

30TH ANNUAL PLANT FAIR

04/18/2024

Ask a Master Gardener

Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts



Mark Your Calendar:

Skagit Master Gardener Plant Fair—A Growing Tradition

Enjoy fun for the entire family on Saturday, May 11, 2024 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

By Claire Cotnoir and Hank Davies

Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardeners and Co-Chairs of the 2024 Plant Fair

Thirty Years and Growing

On Saturday, May 11, 2024 (the Saturday before Mother's Day, per tradition), the Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation will hold its annual Plant Fair, taking over the entire Skagit County Fairgrounds in Mount Vernon from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. offering something for every gardener.

The annual Plant Fair kicks off summer for Skagit area gardeners with thousands of quality garden plants for sale, all locally grown or selected by Skagit County Master Gardeners and chosen for success in our local environment. The event is free, parking is free, and master gardener plant recommendations and advice are free. Thousands of plants and other items are available at very reasonable prices.

The Skagit County Fairgrounds, at 501 Taylor Street, is just south of downtown Mount Vernon. Follow the signs to the south entrance on Taylor Street. Note: although the parking area is ample, it is not unusual for a line to form in the earlier hours of the event. Pack your patience or consider coming a bit later.

Sometimes, It's Fun to Look Back

Gardeners are often surprised by old photos of their gardens and are always delighted by the growth and development they've seen since. Plants grow, gardens grow-- and boy, do gardening events grow! As Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardeners are growing and grooming plants to prepare for their 30th annual Plant Fair, they share fond memories of their earlier, smaller events.

The space allotted for master gardener plant sales, demonstrations, the plant clinic, and The Emporium has also grown all in spacious, comfortable indoor spaces. You'll find the space for vendor booths, which has also grown, with indoor and outdoor spaces.

Master Gardener Plants Are the Best!

If you're looking for tomato plants, head straight for Building D (affectionately dubbed The Tomato Barn), where more than 3,000 plants will be available. You'll find 40+ varieties that have proven to be favorites of Skagit Valley tomato lovers, plus limited numbers of some "rare and unusual" types. New this year is the Skagit Dwarf Tomato Project. In response to many requests for tomato plants that could be grown in a pot on a deck or condo/apartment balcony, master gardeners have sourced a limited quantity of plants that perfectly fit this need. Look for a table of dwarf varieties at the back of the barn. Or ask one of the many master gardeners for assistance.



Left: Choose from an abundance of annuals and perennials in the Pavilion. **Right:** You'll find 40+ proven favorites of Skagit Valley tomato lovers, plus limited numbers of "rare and unusual" types.

Like last year, the vast Pavilion building will host a variety of annual and perennial plants, both ornamental and edible. This year's fair will feature spectacular flowering plant varieties, including *Lisianthus*, an uncommon and beautiful rose-like plant that is

notoriously difficult to start. Master gardeners have done the hard part for you. *Lisianthus* will be available in apricot, green, and white this year. Hanging baskets of *Fuchsia* and *Coleus* pots will be ready for Mother's Day gifting. Many more varieties for sale include *Cosmos*, *Dianthus*, *Eucalyptus*, white lace flower (*Orlaya grandiflora*), *Scabiosa*, snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), stock (*Matthiola incana*), strawflower (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*), *Zinnia*, bellflower (*Campanula* spp.), bells of Ireland (*Moluccella laevis*), love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascene*), and *Silene* 'Blushing Lanterns.'

In the vegetable section, master gardeners have grown popular varieties well-suited to the local climate. A few examples of the vegetable and herb starts you will find include beet, broccoli, cabbage, cucumber, Florence fennel, kale, leek, melon, onion, pepper, pumpkin, Swiss chard, shallot, spinach, summer squash, winter squash, tomatillo, basil, chive, cilantro, and dill.

As always, a wide variety of perennials will be available, including many native plant varieties and edibles like berries, rhubarb, grapes, figs, and perennial herbs. Of course, you'll find perennially popular peonies! And for the first time, beautiful 'Spider's Web' *Fatsia*. Also, ferns, trees, shrubs, iris, hardy geranium, *Hosta*, *Epimedium*, *Trillium*, *Delphinium*, wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)—the list goes on. New this year, a pollinator exhibit will help you understand which plants attract which pollinators, their bloom times, and the importance of pollinators for our gardens and the planet.



Left: Bring your plant questions to discuss with a master gardener at the plant clinic held in the Pavilion. **Right:** Get ready to go! Bring your boxes, carts, wagons, and, most importantly, your wish list.

Plants and So Much More

Just inside the Pavilion's main entrance, master gardener plant clinic experts will help you with plant questions and problems. Across the aisle, shop at The Emporium for lightly used garden tools, books, art, and vases. Here, you'll also find information on the Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener Program, upcoming events, and how to become a master gardener.

Get your pruners ready—the popular tool sharpening station is in the Pavilion this year and with increased staff. Bring your tools and let our tool experts prepare you for all your summer gardening exploits.

As you exit the Pavilion, head next door to the 'Free Parking for Paid Plants' area, where you can “park” your purchases while you continue shopping and enjoying a bite to eat and music in the picnic area. Our popular plant-parking service is returning this year with help from local 4-H members. In Building G, 4-H will also host their annual Small Animal Fair.

All along the grass fairway and in Building C, Plant Fair visitors will find a variety of vendors selling handcrafted wares such as jewelry, glass/metal art, wood sculptures, and gardening equipment. Plus, more plants! Visit educational booths to learn about noxious weeds, energy conservation, bats, and bees. Locally sourced food and drink vendors will be on hand to keep your energy up.



Left: On the grass fairway vendors will be selling more plants, garden art, food and more. **Right:** A wide variety of perennials will be available, including many native plant varieties and edibles.

Demonstrations for Learning

Try attending one of the short gardening demos from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. presented in Building B. Demo topics include pruning, planting tomatoes, gardening with native plants, and more. You may already know Building B as the quilt building if you regularly attend the annual Skagit County Fair. This year, the demonstration area will be surrounded by a colorful display of garden-themed quilts on loan from master gardeners and friends.

Get Ready to Go

Bring your boxes, carts, wagons, and, most importantly, your wish list! To help you plan, tomato variety descriptions, plant lists, a vendor list, and demonstration schedules will be available by the end of April on the Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation website at <https://www.skagitmg.org/plant-fair>.



Left: Happy customers at the plant fair! **Right:** Pick up your tomato favorites from the 3000+ plants selected for our climate and grown by local master gardeners.

Supporting Skagit County Gardeners

Proceeds generated from the Plant Fair enable the Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation, a non-profit organization working in partnership with Washington State University Extension, to support home gardeners by promoting science-based gardening practices and education throughout the year. To learn more about events and programs, visit <https://www.skagitmg.org>. And join our mailing list to stay informed all year: <https://www.skagitmg.org/mailling-list/>.

Do you love the Plant Fair? You can help make it great next year by becoming a Skagit County Extension Master Gardener! Ask any master gardener at the fair what they love about the program. To learn about the application process, inquire at the Plant Fair Emporium in the Pavilion building or visit <http://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/mg/apply/>



Claire Cotnoir and Hank Davies

ABOUT THE AUTHORS :

Claire Cotnoir and Hank Davies are the Co-Chairs of the Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener Plant Fair and co-coordinators of the Japanese Garden, Common Areas, and Structures in the Discovery Garden located on SR 536, west of Mount Vernon.



Free Admission & Parking
May 11, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Skagit County Fairground